

This is an interview with Dorcas Gill on the 19th of October 1995 talking about Eastham and the interviewer is Rosemary Abbott for the Eastham Historical Society. We're going to talk about what the area looked like around the Swift-Daley house back in 1939 when Mrs. Daley and her family bought the house. Dorcas is talking:

As I remember when we looked at the house in 1939, August, my family had decided they wanted to look at an old house to redo. My father had asthma real bad and he needed a project. We had five cottages down on Cooks Brook Road. I live there now and it's called Steele Road, in the original cottage we built in 1932 when I was a little girl. We came there summers seven or eight years, and my father got continually worse and we found this old house. We went to see Ralph Chase, our old real estate man in town. Ralph said, "I've got a wonderful old house but its a terrible mess." We had driven by it several times going back and forth but had no idea the house was even there because it was all grown up in the front yard with Ilanthas trees. We went up and looked at it. It was falling apart. It wasn't even locked, the back door was wide open, some of the windows were broken but most of them were intact. So we went through the old house and looked it all over. We thought it was in pretty good shape as far as the structure goes. My father, being a half-assed carpenter, says, "Well, it looks like we can do something with this. So, my brother and I, we were sixteen and fourteen years old, we were all excited. It took a little bit of getting ready, things to do, and so the price tag came out at \$2,100. Twenty-one hundred dollars. My mother and my father said, "My goodness, that's quite a lot of money." Anyway we said we guessed we could have it. It belonged to Stanley Horton. It had been vacant for ten or fifteen years, nobody had lived there. Anyway, Ralph Chase got \$300, and Stanley Horton got the rest. My father said to Ralph Chase when we signed the papers, "I'm probably crazy to be doing this!" Chase said, "Yes, Daley, crazy like a fox!"

The papers were passed around the fifteenth of September so we were still living down at our cottage by the beach and my brother and I started high school, me a junior and he a freshman. We immediately went every day after school, my father would be there. My brother and I would get off the school bus and we started doing things that needed to be done. My father engaged a plumber and electrician and a mason.

There were no fireplaces in the house. There was no particular kitchen but in one part of the main room of the house, it had been divided off into two separate rooms. One little room to the left of the fireplace as you go in the back door was a little kitchen and there was a sink and an old hand pump at the back window there. Then there was an old back door there where the closet is now. Ralph Chase, this realtor, told us when he was a little boy that was his sleeping room. He used to go in and out that back room and pick asparagus every morning and all day long and that was his little sleeping room.

There was no toilet inside the house. There was a little outhouse in a corner of the old shop which is out back now. You can see the remains of it in the floor where there was a partition, grooves in the floor. It was a two-holer where you could sit side by side and talk! The plumber came and put the well in. My father and Mr. Ordway, from down here on Cooks Brook Road came up and helped him put the well in and then the plumber came and hitched everything up. We took part of the little Borning Room - that was one whole room, you can see where the partition had been - we took part of that room and made it into the bathroom which it is today.

As far as the kitchen goes the main kitchen was sort of like a dining room at that time and the kitchen was in the back room where the little eating parlor is now. There was a chimney there that went up through the back part of the house. There was an old stove that had been hitched up there, I presume for cooking. The cooking stove was gone but there was an old heater type stove when we got there. There was a crude stairway right beside the chimney into the upstairs room which is nothing but an open attic now. That was just sort of open there and there was no hatch cover or anything over it so if you tried to heat anything the heat went right up there. The little ell which we use for storage now, was a pantry. When we remodelled we turned the pantry into a little dinette with a little table and chair in there. Then we moved the doorway. You used to go right along the side where the big picture window is. We moved that doorway over after we took the stairway out. and made it one big room with the archway between the rooms.

We commenced to start in on the woodwork and we used a blowtorch to burn the paint in the Keeping Room, the main room. We used that for our main living room. We had three fireplaces put in: one in the parlor, one in the bedroom and one in the keeping room. There was plenty of space in behind. We could see there the old mantelpieces had been. Everything was wallpapered

right down to the floor. We replaced the mantels and everything, that we could see from the original woodwork. In the front bedroom, we decided that there were no closets, we'd better have a closet in the bedroom. We had plenty of room under the front stairs. So we cut a hole in the wall, took the plaster off and Low and Behold! behind the plaster was that great big nice panelling with the heart carved in it. So, we could see then that there had been a fireplace there. We said, "Oh, dear!, we can't put a closet in here, we've got to put this fireplace back! That made the three fireplaces. Outside of that most everything we did, we just kept patching walls and patching ceilings. We did the Keeping Room in natural wood, used the linseed and turpentine to make the colors in the wood come out. Same thing with the floors. The rest of the floors we just painted. We built a modern kitchen as you can see, in the kitchen area, all the kitchen cabinets. Then, in 1944 when I was married to Merton Gill, we had a little boy in 1945 whose name was Roger. Roger and I had lots of fun doing different things. About 1947 or '48 Peter Hunt was doing great work in Orleans at Peacock Alley. Everybody was into Peter Hunt work, so I went up to his shop and bought a book and came home and started decorating the kitchen. My husband thought I was out of my mind. But anyway I did the kitchen with all our family for some of the caricatures that are on the doors. We lived there until 1950, 1949. My mother and father went to Florida every year. They stayed down there at Daytona Beach. In the summertime they came back up here and spent the summer with us, about three months, and then they went back to Florida. Well, I got awfully tired of walking over these bent up floors and going inside and outside and we didn't have any central heat. We had a stove hitched up in one of the fireplaces in the main room which wasn't that adequate and a few rugs on the floor which my mother braided. Some rugs from us are still there so you can see how old they are. The wind would come up through the floors, so anyway, we decided we guessed it was time for us to build a new house, so my mother and father gave my brother and me each a piece of land on the north side of the house. We built my house and his house at the same time. Had the cellar holes dug. My brother, Marston, had been to Wentworth Institute. He taught me what I needed to know, so he would show me on his house and then I'd work on my house. We did that in 1949 and by 1950 we moved out of the old Swift house and I was some glad to be gone I'll tell you!

Since then I've painted it (Swift house) many, many times for my mother and father. One time we painted it a kind of pretty dark red. We thought that looked pretty nice for awhile. But then that word~~d~~ off so we went back to the white paint.

The fields out back were all asparagus. You could see all the way to Muddy Pond. There were no trees in the back. We had an old cartpath out through the fields. My husband and I, kids in the neighborhood, Tommy Dill, and Bishop Covell. We drove old Model T's all through those thirteen acres of land. We had a wonderful time.

Down on the pond there was a sand pit. The Post Office was outgrowing the store where Mr. and Mrs. Barton had it which Eddie Brown owns now. So they came to see if my father to see if he would build a post office on his land. My father said, "I'll sell you a piece of land but I don't want to build the building because I don't want to go through all those specs." So he agreed to sell the piece of land. He thought they had too many restrictions in the building code. The government didn't want to own the land so the Parsons Company, they are a lumber company in Maine, they came and saw my father and said, yes, we'll take the land. So, we spent about a month carting sand and filling in that land because it dropped right off to the low level. So we cleaned out the sand pit and brought all the sand up front and filled in the land for them and then sold it to Parsons and he now owns it, and rents it to the govenment.

Then we, my family, decided, my oldest son was now married and in the service, he thought something of coming home to live from Lawton, Oklahoma and my oldest daughter, Judy she was also married and she needed a piece of land. My father got together with Dick Vandermay. They put the road in between the post office and the Mobil station, a 40 foot right of way. 20 feet belong tous, 20 feet belong to Vandermay. It was/is a private road. That let Vandermay open up his back land. They both paid to have it tarred. Judy got her house lot, first one on the right. And that was Vandale Avenue (Vandermay + Daley) Then when my son wanted his house, they decided they'd better develop a few more lots down on the pond. So then they put in Appleseed Road or Way, whichever they call it. My brother developed developed that and built, first the house for my son and then he had two house lots for sale and then my brother built his house at the end of the cul-de-sac.

There were not many trees in the

We have now sold the back lot. We had seven and a half and my brother is just settling up the estate now, I hope! Anyway its now five house lots.

? What about the land the gas station is on?

The land that the gas station is on has always been exactly like that.

Old Bill Forrest who owned the land across the street which used to be the Gristmill Restaurant, owned that and he owned the gas station. It used to be Socony. Then Al Stowell bought the property from Old Bill Forrest. He built the new gas station. I can't remember what year. Vandermay bought it finally and then he sold it to Socony Comany, Mobil Oil. Ralph Perrault, Sonny, he just leased it. And now Mark (Herman) who is married to my youngest daughter, Pam, leases it from Sacony.

Vandermay wanted the road there to develop his back land. He put six or eight house lots in back on Vandale Avenue.

? When your family bought the house your family moved down here fulltime. You then went to school here?

I graduated from Orleans High in 1941.

? How did you get to school?

We had school buses. Uncle Nate Clark drove one. Art Nickerson drove one Old Bill Forrest drove one. Mr. Brewer drove a school bus, Howard Brewer's uncle, and old Harry Collins. Harry was through driving the school bus by the time I got permanently here in 1939. He drove in the 1920's and early 1930's. Orleans High was across from there the Orleans Town Hall is now. Right beside the Orleans Historical Society building. I guess there's nothing there now but the Legion Hall. We moved up to the new building in 1940. We had a lot of friends from Brewster to Wellfleet because it was regionalized then.

? What did your husband Mert Gill do for a living after he grew up?

He worked right across the street from the Swift-Daley house at Herman Dill's garage, Tommy Dill's father. He was the head mechanic there until 1950. Then Joe McQuade built the McQuade Garage Building in Orleans right beside the Dairy Queen. He wanted him to manage that for him. So he went to work and managed the shop. The had Lincoln, Mercury, all kinds of used cars.

They took cars in trade and in 1953 my father bought a 1950 Ford Pickup Truck from my husband for \$800. My father had it for many years. In 1971 before he died he gave it to me and I still have it in my garage! The 1950 Ford and we still use it for our parades Windmill Weekend.

I must say, two weeks ago when you had the Open House (Columbus Day weekend 1995) I was stationed in the Tool House Museum and people came in and most everybody remarked they had never seen such a nice tool collection, so many old tools in one place. Two or three Orleans people said weren't we lucky to have such a nice place to display the tools and have such a nice house to show people.

When my mother decided about the Historical Society and the Swift House, she said to my brother and me, "Do either one of you want this house?" I said, "Mom, I lived in that house for five years under the most deplorable conditions and I'm so sick of walking on limpy floors, crazy stairways and not having a nice heating system that I don't want any part of it!" She said, "I'm considering giving it to the Historical Society." I said, "I think they'll love it if they can afford to keep it." She said, "Well, I'll give it to them with the understanding that I'll be able to live there as long as I want to and I'll pay my own electricity and so forth and my own heating bills. By this time they had had central heat put in the house, in the main room and in the back part. But with all the doors shut up she kept quite comfortable.

I can remember her sitting in the picture window.

Yes, sitting there in the nice sunlight.

Didn't she do some baking there?

She did it when she retired in 1949, 1950. She had quite a bakery business going. In fact, that Sunday, I had one lady said - I can remember buying your mother's bread. Roger was about 14-15 years old and he'd go and help my mother and stir all that batter and she'd pay him once a month or so. He'd write his hours down in a little book.

✓ So Roger grew up here all his life.

Yes, we had four children, six years between them all. So we had them from one to seventeen.

? Did you have any brothers or sisters?

I had an older brother but he mostly wasn't here. He might have spent a winter or two with us. He died young from cancer. Back in the forties. My brother Marston and I did all the work with my father and mother.

The fireplaces: they had nailed the lathes right onto the wood. It was all filled in with plaster right down to the floor. Where the bricks were on the floor had been all filled with boards. We could see that but we didn't pay too much attention to that, thinking there was a fireplace there.... they did have the little stove tunnels in, in all three rooms. But we had no idea there had been a fireplace there. They had taken all the fireplaces out.

? Who was the mason your father hired?

Don Grayson from Yarmouth. He was an old friend of my family. The plumber was Ed Walsh from Centerville. He was also a family friend.

In fact, the original cottage down on Steele Road, the house I live in now, has the same well that it had in 1932! That Ed Walsh had said to my father, "Mr. Daley, do you want a good point or a cheap one?" That was when the house was built. My father said, "What's the difference in price?" "I can put you in a galvanized one and it costs \$1.29, or I can put you in a brass one and that will cost you \$4.50." My father said, "You better put in the brass one because I'm planning to be around here for a long time!" The well is only 21 feet deep and we're still using it today. We hit a vein and we've never been out of water. And across the street, its solid rust@

? Tell me about the cottages.

How we happened to come here was - one of my aunts, a maiden lady was a housekeeper for a family in Harwich, the Darlings. They came from Hopedale, Mass and we came from Menden which was the next town to Hopedale. All my family was born in Menden. My aunt said she knew someone who rented little cottages over on Pleasant Lake in Harwich. My mother and father said that was nice. They would like to rent for a week or so. So my aunt rented it for us on Pleasant Lake right in Route 124. There was a railroad track between us and Pleasant Lake. We had to go across the track to the lake for swimming. The train came through every morning and every night. We thought that was pretty nice but my family, with three little children, had to be pretty careful crossing Route 124. plus the railroad track to get to the beach.

My other aunt who lived in Providence had a friend who had a cottage down at Cooks Brook. She thought maybe we could rent that. So, in 1940 and 1941 we rented it for two weeks each summer. That house across from my house is it.

My father and mother would come up and sit on this cranberry knoll and they'd say, wouldn't it be wonderful to have a cottage right here on this knoll. We would look out and see the whole of Cape Cod. We found out it was owned by a Mr. Pierce. We went to see Mr. Pierce. He lived over on Aspinet Road, right side of where Arthur and Marcia Nickerson live now. My father said I'd like to buy a piece of land. Mr. Pierce said, why sure... so he came down and looked at it and said how much do you want? My father said one hundred by two hundred, something like that. Mr. Pierce said, I've started to make a little plan of the Pierce Development. I'm going to put in a road and I'm going to call it Pierce Road. It's 175 feet from the road down to Cooks Brook Road. So my father said, cut me out a 200 foot chunk. So he did and we built this cottage in 1932.

After we got the cottage built, of course, we came weekends and vacation. My mother was still at her job at Worcester, Suburban in her kitchen work. Doing cooking schools and home demonstrations.

So we came down Friday nights. I remember my father had a 1932 Essex and my mother had a 1932 Chevrolet, pretty soon we had a 1934 Chevrolet. We didn't travel very fast in those days. About 30-35 miles an hour on the old Route 6 which is now 6A.

We got the house built. My mother had five sisters. Their families wanted to ask if they could rent it for a week or two. Or else could they come for a visit. My mother said all I do is cook weekends when I'm here. We'd better build another cottage, for the guests. So we built the little white one down here, number 2 on the road. Everybody seemed to get into the swing of things and Oh, could we rent your cottage. It was kind of expensive at \$25 a week. So they built another cottage behind that and it just kept growing. Then they filled up this parcel of land. Then they bought two more lots on the other side and built two more cottages.

In the meantime, along about 1937 Brad Steele had a piece of land for sale on Cooks Brook Road, up by the Catholic Church. It went practically the whole length of the road. My father bought the whole right hand side of the road for \$200!! He cut it up into 13 or 14 lots. He sold them all for \$200 each. The old house on the corner across from the church. All the way down from there. Steele Road was not here in those days. That was just a little swampy area. No houses. The road stopped right here at our cottage. There were no houses and no road from here in 1932. There was a wagon path where they went out to their weirs. The Lee family had weirs right out here. There was a lot of rum running out here also. After awhile, I don't remember when it was, they finally put the road through.



They wanted to sell lots on that end of Steele Road so they changed the name to Steele Road right straight through to the beach.

? At that point you had five cottages?

No, we had six. The '38 hurricane took down our rabbit hutch in Menden.

That was the year before we bought the Swift-Daley House. It knocked it off of its pillar and knocked it sideways. It was 250 feet long, but narrow, so it had a lot of wood in it. Took it all apart, piece by piece and my father in his old '34 Chevvie brought it down in his trailer and we built a cottage up on Cooks Brook Road that was number 5.

This one here - pointing to next door- was built in 1947 or 48. That was number six. (that is the one which was torn down by accident(?) by Allard in 1993 or 4 and big new house stands on the spot)

So they were doing real good with their summer cottages. My mother was able to retire in 1950 and enjoy things and her house. So in 1972 they decided to liquidate some of their cottages, they were getting older and my father couldn't handle things anymore. They sold all the cottages.

This parcel of land my house is on they divided it in two and sold those two houses on that lot and gave me that lot and this cottage. I rented it for ten years, then after my family, kids all got out of our big house on Route 6 in Eastham, we decided we'd fix this for our little retirement home down here: I did that in 1982. Its a little harder getting into town but its quiet. I walk the dog. I take her to the beach a couple of times a day. We have electric heat but I also have a wood stove.

I insulated it all good. We built on the pool room and a little workshop and the garage. We finished off the cellar downstairs. So we have a nice warm place down there.

Addendum for anyone reading this in future years: the land and house Dorcas Gill and her brother Marston Daley were given was directly next door to the Swift-Daley house on Route 6. Gill house is directly next door and the house Marston Daley built is after that just before Superette. Owned by Mills family (Mrs. Mills was Marston's first wife, later married Albert Mills.)